

Learning From Each Other: Troubleshooting

Second Discussion Breakout, Strategies for Advancing Hidden Collections Webinar #3, featuring Sarah Leu: Recruitment, Retention, and Reward

January 25, 2017

NOTES

Challenges

Practicum students take a tremendous amount of staff time.

committing to people who ultimately are not suited to the volunteer roles

Exaggeration of skills and sometimes poor commitment

Solutions

Shared supervision, close supervision

Clear instructions for tasks including how you want the task accomplished

Having a manual with policies for volunteers, students, and interns to review

Group orientations

Incremental responsibilities

Well constructed interviews or casual conversations to get to know them in order to match to the best project

Exit interviews to continue improving the program

Reward and recognition

Thank you videos

Written thank yous

Visual thank yous in the public collection space (e.g., digital slide show or display case)

CHAT HISTORY

Sarah Leu: What challenges have you faced or are you concerned about with students, interns, or volunteers?

Allison Young: We have had some challenging "help" from minors being made to volunteer by their parents, to get them out of the house during the summer.

Sachiko Iwabuchi: Different skill sets among the student employees; consistency among the students' work; hard to find time to meet all together (supervisor and students when students take different courses)

Cherry: Exaggeration of skills and sometimes poor commitment (even when paid)

Priscilla Eppinger/American Baptist Historical Society: Collections are valuable and access is restricted. Volunteers have to be trustworthy.

Dee Gallo: A couple times, I had issues because my volunteers were working more efficiently than my staff members. That was a delicate dance...

University of Chicago: Practicum students take a tremendous amount of staff time.

Geoffrey Reynolds: Students sometimes come in thinking they know more about archives than I do. :(

Amanda Strobel Wise | Rock County Historical Society: We are in a period of rapid growth, so it is my job to make sure that long-time volunteers do not feel that they are being left behind. Their main complaint is lack of communication, which gives me a clear objective as the program manager.

Rhodes College: Training young transcriptionists to read cursive

Eric Colleary: We sometimes encounter volunteer 'fatigue' where, even after switching up types of projects occasionally, they burn out.

Naomi Steinberger: sometimes there is laborious training and then they don't stay or follow up

Deborah H., McKendree: Our volunteers don't seem to last long. We always need to re-train.

Cathy Miller/Cameron Kainerstorfer: Our library used to do a general semester-length practicum, with some time set aside to work with the archives as an option. Coordinating the scheduling needs between the other library departments and the archives was a huge challenge. Events and other sessions held by the other departments would remove time from the archives project work, or require sudden rescheduling. We have solved this by specifying a 100% archives/special collection practicum.

Paulette Schwarting: we require a background check for all employees and volunteers

Naomi Steinberger: committing to people who ultimately are not suited to the volunteer roles

Melissa Anderson: we've had problems with volunteers that come in saying they're prepared to volunteer on a regular basis and then flake out in less than a month

Thomas Y Levin (Phono-Post Project, Princeton Univ.): The understandable anxiety about flawed or sloppy data entry can be allayed by having all student work put into some sort of temporary hold until it is "blessed" by someone with higher curatorial authority. An additional and crucial failsafe mechanism is to be sure that your archive structure has versioning, allowing you to roll back to prior states of the asset metadata.

Robin Grunwald: They are too good, get hired up in the org :)

Allison Young: Some other school/college volunteers are only helping to get the academic credit, and their heart doesn't seem to be in it. It can be hard to give them a satisfying experience and get quality work done.

Shawna Gandy: When older volunteers start making mistakes and don't recognize that it's time to stop volunteering.

Sachiko Iwabuchi: I hate to mention this but sometimes students have no idea of "working" (getting paid by actually doing work). Sometimes I have to teach students that their eating lunch in front of the computer and web surfing are not considered their "work time."

Jessica Holada: We have attempted to do distributed experiences with interns. Rather than one staff member taking an intern for a month, three faculty/staff will work with an intern for one

week each. It's hard to have the time for oversight over many weeks.. A challenge we tried to mitigate with shared supervision.

Jaime: An intern who misrepresented their level of interest in our type of collections, couldn't get them to focus on the task they were given

Allison Young: Having to teach soft skills

Naomi Steinberger: Work that we have to ultimately redo, or discard because their data entry is not accurate.

Sachiko Iwabuchi: I had the same experience with Naomi. My time of redoing students' work was too much, and I had to reassign them a different task.

Jessica Holada: We spend a lot of energy hiring. We have been lucky in that they stay with us, sometimes for three years. We have spent more time developing training modules. This was also shared work. Having them all together for orientation created a sense of a cohort. This was new for us this year.

Amanda Strobel Wise | Rock County Historical Society: I found that a handbook with official policies for both interns and volunteers has solved a lot of the problems we have had in the past; an agreement between staff and their volunteer/intern also clearly defines our relationship and what we expect, and I have found that interviews with volunteers really helps us to match the right person with the right position

Jessica Holada: We pay them.

Allison Young: Pairing long-term volunteers with newbies helps

Melissa Anderson: we start volunteers out with relatively simple tasks and inform them that we'll promote them to more interesting projects if they prove reliable

Jaime: Explain the whole project and end goals up front so they can be excited about it, even though they would only see a portion of it during their time here

Amanda Strobel Wise | Rock County Historical Society: I write down everything and then review them every year! I love my handbook.

Jessica Holada: Also, we really train them to do high-level work that is always different (digitizing, preservation, exhibit support, blogging, etc.)

Jessica Holada: We do try to match skills with what we need.

Naomi Steinberger: solutions: close supervision, starting with simple tasks and making them more complex as their skill set warrents.

Sachiko Iwabuchi: I agree with Naomi, close supervision. But I have tons of meetings I need to attend, I have/had doctor's appointments, and my time and my students' work time often didn't match.

Jessica Holada: It's very important to see what students are best at. We always seek detail orientation, but inevitably, some will have better hand skills over others, for instance, but others will be great with tech.

Cathy Miller/Cameron Kainerstorfer: We have learned a lot from exit interviews, and have been able to refine and improve practicums over time.

Amanda Strobel Wise | Rock County Historical Society: We just made this video yesterday: https://www.facebook.com/rockctyhistory/?hc_ref=PAGES_TIMELINE&fref=nf

Allison Young: Our volunteers love written recognition, being sure to mention them *specifically* during media interviews, and on our social media.

Jessica Holada: We haven't done this yet, but one of our librarians does an end-of-year assessment with his students. "We trained you to do x. Did this prepare you? What could have helped you?"

Jessica Holada: This helps refine our training.